News release

Storm warnings helped power company

30 October 2002

As parts of Britain continue to clear up after the weekend's storms, the Met Office and Western Power Distribution (WPD) have revealed that, by working together, they managed to limit the amount of disruption to people in south Wales and the south-west.

WPD was just one organisation that received timely warnings of the severe weather event from the Met Office. From as early as Thursday the Met Office was warning that gales would hit the country on Saturday and Sunday.

Stewart Wass, the Met Office's Head of Public Services, said: "Many media reports suggest that the cost of the recent storm is around £50 million, but this only covers the insured damage. An economic model developed by the Met Office puts the total cost at around £1.5 billion - 50% greater than the total for an average year. We also calculate the other factors, such as time lost through delays and compensation payments. Typically, only 0.5% of total losses are avoided because of lack of response to warnings or through companies not taking effective early action. However, we are working with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to try to establish a major programme of improvements that will raise this figure tenfold. These include better detection and forecasting of severe weather at a local level, and education and training in how to mitigate. We would hope to build on best practice procedures followed by such companies as WPD."

WPD's Chief Executive, Robert Symons, said: "The warnings we received on Friday were accurate and helped us to prepare for the severe storm that hit us during the early hours of Sunday morning. It enabled us to open all our offices at 7 a.m. on Sunday and call in all available staff, helping us to clear up over 90% of problems within the first 24 hours."

Severe weather warnings are issued for strong winds, freezing rain, blizzards, dense fog and heavy rainfall via the National Severe Weather Warning Service (NSWWS). The aim of NSWWS is to alert the community by providing warnings of severe weather that may cause widespread disruption or danger to life.

Warnings are provided in three ways:
1. To the public at large via the broadcast media
2. To the civil emergency authorities, who are likely to be involved in the aftermath of severe weather conditions
3. To the Ministry of Defence when conditions may become sufficiently severe as to warrant military aid to the civil community.

It is warnings such as these that help utilities, such as WPD, to improve response times in a crisis by taking swift action, such as bringing in extra manpower to an affected area before the bad weather strikes.

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